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Viewing cable 09QUITO801, CORREA,S STEADY VERBAL ASSAULT ON MEDIA CREATES

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#09QUITO801**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09QUITO801	2009-09-02 21:35	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Quito

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.eluniverso.com/2011/04/13/1/1355/cable-223441.html>

VZCZCXYZ0011
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHQT #0801/01 2452135
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 022135Z SEP 09
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0812
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 8344
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 4259
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 3690
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ SEP LIMA 3379
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL 4590

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 000801

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: TWENTY YEARS
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAO](#) [EC](#)
SUBJECT: CORREA,S STEADY VERBAL ASSAULT ON MEDIA CREATES
HOSTILE CLIMATE

REF: A. QUITO 00791
[1](#)B. QUITO 00437

Classified By: Amb...

id: 223441
date: 9/2/2009 21:35
refid: 09QUITO801
origin: Embassy Quito
classification: CONFIDENTIAL
destination: 09QUITO437|09QUITO791
header:
VZCZCXYZ0011
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHQT #0801/01 2452135
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 022135Z SEP 09
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0812
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 8344
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 4259
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 3690
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RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL 4590

----- header ends -----

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 000801

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: TWENTY YEARS
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAO](#) [EC](#)
SUBJECT: CORREA,S STEADY VERBAL ASSAULT ON MEDIA CREATES
HOSTILE CLIMATE

REF: A. QUITO 00791
[1](#)B. QUITO 00437

Classified By: Ambassador Heather Hodges for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Upon being sworn in for his second presidential term on August 10, Rafael Correa showed no sign of letting up his verbal assault against the privately-owned media. On the contrary, Correa proclaimed the press to be his "greatest adversary" over the last 31 months of his first term. Verbal aggressions against the press have become a regular feature in his weekly radio and television addresses, and the increase in harassment cases against journalists have many in the profession concerned about the intensifying hostile climate. Many perceive the President's systematic attacks as an intentional strategy to discredit the press and further consolidate power, although how far he will go remains unclear. END SUMMARY.

CORREA'S CRY FOR BATTLE

[1](#)2. (SBU) On August 10, in his 90-minute inaugural address, Correa once again lashed out at the press, which he referred to as his "greatest adversary," apparently more important than troubled relations with Colombia, worsening border security, and growing urban crime. Furthermore, Correa discredited the press for having a "clear political role in spite of not having any political legitimacy." This type of rhetoric is a continuation of the tone of Correa's weekly radio and television addresses (reftel B). In March, Correa dismissed the Inter-American Press Association's mid-year report, based on the organization's lack of "moral authority" due to the fact they never won an election. He regularly refers to the privately-owned press as "mediocre and corrupt," and asserts that it "manipulates public opinion," "lies" and "publishes garbage." In May, Correa stated that the press was "a grave political enemy (that) needs to be defeated" and listed the alleged "worst" media outlets in terms of corruption--Hoy, El Universo, and La Hora.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The national privately-owned media has been the primary target of Correa's criticism, with the less affluent

and less influential provincial and local newspapers receiving less attention and therefore less pressure. According to Correa, independent media outlets and their elitist owners have "historically lined up with the oligarchy," and "there exists a contradiction" between their commercial agendas and the social service of providing information that the press is obliged to fulfill. A number of Embassy sources, including journalists, editors, and representatives of professional associations and nonprofit media think tanks and NGOs, stated that in spite of the President's complaints about elitists, his tactic of generalized vilification of the press is hurting journalists on the front line and not the owners.

CORREA SPENDS \$11 MILLION ON PUBLICITY--TELEAMAZONAS GETS \$1.3 MILLION

14. (SBU) Ironically, Correa's strategy to discredit the press would be less effective without the press itself and specifically the private press. According to a recent report by Vanguardia, the presidency, excluding ministries and other dependent entities, has spent 11 million dollars on television, radio and newspaper publicity since the beginning of 2008. Based on figures provided by the Under Secretary for Image, Publicity and Promotion of the Presidency, the greatest recipient of this spending has been Teleamazonas, the independent station threatened with closure by the administration (reftel A and B), with almost 1.3 million dollars in state advertising funds.

CALCULATED STRATEGY TO DELEGITIMIZE THE PRESS

15. (C) The stream of public attacks and criticism by the Ecuadorian government against the press has been a cause for concern among those in the profession. Various media contacts of the Embassy have described the current climate for journalists as "hostile" and a direct result of Correa's public censure of the press. They also described Correa's "systematic" aggression against the media at large as a calculated "strategy" to "delegitimize" the only noteworthy opposition to the current government. According to Embassy contacts, Correa's approach does not allow for any due process or formal rebuttal from the press because they are not legal actions but verbal accusations (although reftel A

and upcoming septel detail legal actions taken). In spite of rough patches with past governments, there is consensus that this steady assault by Correa's administration is an unprecedented phenomenon in Ecuador. They also noted that Correa's repeated attacks against the press have set an example for other high-level government officials to exhibit similar behavior.

CLIMATE OF FEAR

16. (C) Correa's verbal attacks of the private media are being increasingly emulated among the general public. According to the Ecuadorian media advocacy and watch group, Fundamedios, instances of harassment, threats and physical attacks against journalists and other media professionals are on the rise. Statistics show that the average number of incidents since July 2008 was less than seven per month but with a steady increase throughout the year, and June and July of 2009 exhibiting the highest numbers of 12 and 16 incidents, respectively. Cesar Recaurte, Fundamedios director, also noted that in many cases, the attackers repeat Correa's language of a "corrupt and mediocre media."

17. (C) Well-known Teleamazonas anchorman Jorge Ortiz told Embassy Public Affairs officers that there "clearly exists a climate of fear and danger for journalists." Ortiz, a straight-talking and often aggressive interviewer on his daily morning talk show, has been the target of numerous verbal and physical assaults this year, including having his car sideswiped while he was driving near the TV station, another physical assault while he was walking down the street, and most recently, a verbal insult in a Quito shopping center by a stranger yelling out "How much does the

CIA pay you?," a direct reference to allegations made by Correa's ex-Security Minister Gustavo Larrea.

SELF-CENSORSHIP--A REAL CONCERN?

¶8. (C) Although the occurrence of self-censorship is a real concern, the jury is still out as to the degree of its prevalence. Intimidation felt by journalists and the management of media outlets to tone down any criticism of the government is much more difficult to quantify than an upsurge in harassment cases or minutes Correa dedicates to his weekly address to insulting the media. However, a few high-profile cases of individuals quitting due to political pressures have demonstrated that some level of self-censorship exists. In March of this year, Jose Toledo, former vice president of news for the government-confiscated stations (GamaTV, TC Television and CN3 Cablenoticias) resigned due to what he claimed to be political pressure to favor government candidates in April's elections. The following month, Carlos Vera, a former star of Ecuavisa left the station after Ecuavisa management put restrictions on his program's content. While the station may have been giving into government pressure, other factors may have been involved. That said, Vera later claimed that freedom of expression was being restricted by the climate created by Correa's attacks against the press. Journalists from local and provincial media outlets have told EmbOff that they are cautious not to be critical of the current administration because they feel vulnerable.

COMMENT

¶9. (C) The current hostile climate created by Correa's verbal confrontation with the press is disconcerting for many long-time media professionals. As Alfredo Negrete, former editor of El Comercio and current president of the Ecuadorian Press Editors Association, noted to EmbOff, Ecuador is far from being a country in which journalists fear for their lives. However, the "direction in which we are heading is unclear." Correa's weekly public scoldings have journalists and editors fearful and is potentially limiting the space for free expression.

¶10. (C) Correa has also shown himself to be somewhat of a pragmatist. In spite of his nearly constant criticism of Teleamazonas, a station that he has singled out and threatened with closure (reftel A and B), he has yet to make any explicit illegal moves. A few days following Correa's August 29 public demand to shut down Teleamazonas for airing a clandestine audio of Correa regarding alleged illegal changes to the constitution's text (reftel A), the administration's spokesman threw some water on the fire and said that "the President does not necessarily know the laws"

and that the station can only be fined, not shut down. That said, septel will provide more details on the regulatory, economic and legal actions Correa has taken to restrict the press within the limits of the law.

HODGES

=====CABLE ENDS=====